gaining knowledge about Army operations, strategies, their success/ hinderances, etc. against insurgent outfits, having their training camps in neighbouring countries;

(b) if so, whether these were broadly found satisfactory;

(c) whether the Tezpur based 4 Corps Headquarters issued a statement in September, 2005 indicating that ULFA continued to indulge in heinous activities against the Nation without eshewing violence;

(d) whether Government have begun peace talks with ULFA and Army units have been asked to halt their operations against them; and

(e) details of the cease-fire agreement?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) The visit of the Defence Minister to the North-East in September 2005, was to review Defence preparedness of the Army and also to address the troops posted in the area.

(c) to (e) No Statement referred to the Part (c) of the Question has been made by 4 Corps Headquarters, Tezpur, The People's Consultative Group on behalf of United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) held talks with the Government on 26.10.2005, within the Government's policy to hold dialogue, pursue socio- economic development programmes, modernize and strengthen the police/security forces and to tackle the activities of the militants with the help of forces to protect properties, limbs and lives of innocent people.

Indo-Us Trade Forum

3051. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India and US launched "Indo-US Trade Forum" to give thrust so as to double bilateral trade to US$ 40 billion by 2008;

(b) if so, how India is going to overcome the Non-Tariff barriers that US imposes to achieve the goal of (a) above; and

(c) what is the present bilateral trade between India and US?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) to (b) The India-US Trade Policy Forum, which had its first meeting in New Delhi on November 12, 2005, has been designed to act as a forum for taking up issues relating to the expansion of bilateral trade and investment relations between India and the United States. Issues relating to *inter-alia*, the Non-Tariff barriers faced by Indian exports to the US were taken up for discussion during the meeting of the Forum. A doubling of bilateral trade in about three years' time was also discussed in the meeting.

(c) The present bilateral trade between India and the US is as under:

(In US$ million)

Year	Bilateral Trade
2004-05	20,104.66
April-Aug, 2005	8,763.47

Exemption of agricultural commodities from Export Cess

3052. SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to exempt all agricultural commodities from the levy of Export Cess; and

(b) if so, the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) and (b) The Government has approved a proposal for removal of cess on export of agricultural commodities presently levied under the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) Cess Act, 1985; Tobacco Cess Act, 1975; Spices Cess Act, 1986; Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) Act, 1972 and Coffee Act, 1942. A Bill for amending/ repealing these Acts, administered by the Department of Commerce, has already been introduced in the Lok Sabha.